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Reflections on Gender Sensitivity at Masvingo Teachers' College: A Special Case of 2006/ 2007 Student Representative Council Elections

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ABSTRACT

The paper critically examines the concept gender sensitivity with reference to teacher training, particularly at Masvingo Teachers' College. It outlines the special place the concept has at the college in question and in teacher training in general. It also critically analyzes the election framework and the electioneering at the above-named institution vis-à-vis the concept. A qualitative research design was used, in particular document analysis of students' campaign posters, statistics on student enrolment as well as campaign speeches. Observation was intensively used as a data gathering technique whereby the three researchers immersed themselves in the thick of things to capture the minutest of details at the campaign 'rallies'. It was deemed prudent by the researchers to use initials instead of real names in order to maintain a certain degree of confidentiality. The researchers found out that although the college's enrolment policy is skewed in favour of females, this has not translated into gender sensitivity in terms of power distribution in student politics across the sexual divide. A case is made for the need not to pay lip service to the concept but to change teaching strategies and other practices so that gender asymmetry is genuinely tackled. Attention is also drawn to the need to sensitize and equip trainee teachers for the work of deconstructing gender.

INTRODUCTION

The writers have seen more than one version of the mission statement either on display or in use in college official documents. One version

which features on the college Teaching Practice supervision instruments reads:

Masvingo Teachers' College is committed to the production of creative, professional and morally upright primary school teachers for Zimbabwe through quality face to face tuition, distance education and teaching practice.

Yet another version, more relevant to this paper, is displayed in college offices and prominent places such as in the administration block corridor and on the entrance to the library. It reads:

Masvingo Teachers' College is committed to the production of patriotic, reflective, professional, morally upright, and gender sensitive primary school teachers for Zimbabwe through quality face to face tuition, distance education, research and teaching practice.

It is not immediately clear to the writers which of the two versions the official one is. That notwithstanding, an examination of the mission statement quoted first could be revealing that necessary as the gender concept may be, it is missing from the college's mission and needs to be given space. A kinder appreciation of the mission statement will assume that gender sensitivity is perhaps subsumed in the "professionalism" mentioned. However, given that mission statements embody philosophies, outline basic goals, direction and purposes of organizations, leaving matters to assumptions may not be the best way of giving institutions their marching orders.

If the second version, which specifically mentions gender sensitivity, happens to be the one in official use, then this paper is all the more called for. The paper, therefore, becomes an attempt at a social audit on how much the college is obeying its own marching orders of producing "gender sensitive primary school teachers".

Student Enrolment by Sex at Masvingo Teachers' College

Year Group	F	% of enrolment	M	% of enrolment	Total
Year 1 (class of 2007)	235	52.8 %	210	47.2 %	445
Year 2 (class of 2006)	241	55.3	195	44.7	436
Year 3 (class of 2005)	164	53.1%	145	46.9 %	309
Totals	640	53.8%	550	46.2 %	1 190

Source: *Masvingo Teachers' College – Registry Department*

A look at the college enrolment in the past three years shows some interesting scenario. The table shows the administration has skewed the enrolment in favour of females. But is this the alpha and omega of gender sensitivity? Is the superiority in numbers by the females reflected in the power distribution across the sexual divide, in the SRC? These are among a plethora of questions this paper will tackle.

CONCEPTS RELATED TO GENDER SENSITIVITY

Gender issues have become topical the world over hence Goal 3 of The Millennium Development Goals has to do with promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. This results from the fact that women have been a disadvantaged group since time immemorial. Thus, in the people's quest to address the disparities existing between men and women, gender has been misconstrued to refer to women. It has also been associated with radical feminism hence whenever gender issues crop up; people believe it is about women or the girl-child. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish between sex and gender in order to properly contextualize the concepts 'gender sensitivity' and 'gender awareness' which are crucial in the realization of such a goal. It is also important to note here that the school plays a pivotal role in this endeavour as a major agent of socialization. Sex refers to 'male-female differences that are biological' (Ministry of Education Sport and Culture and

UNICEF,1998:5) while gender refers to 'socially allotted roles, activities and responsibilities, which are ascribed to women and men on account of their sex' (McFadden (Ed), 2003: 7).Sex is a biological concept – human beings are male or female from the moment of conception. There is a universal agreement on what constitutes maleness or femaleness; for example the organs. One's sex can only be changed through surgery otherwise one remains male or female for life. While sex differences between men and women are universal and fixed, gender differences are not as can be drawn from its definition. Gender refers to socially constructed differences between men and women which are learned change over time and have wide variation within and between cultures (Meena, 1992; Marcus and Ducklin, 1998; Shaba, 2002).Clearly implied here is the relativity of maleness and femaleness as each culture attaches certain human traits to each sex. This is reinforced by major agents of socialization such as the family, peer groups, school and the mass media. One can perceive sex as natural and gender as 'nurtural'.

Femaleness, Femininity and Feminism

Femaleness, Femininity and Feminism are also concepts that are closely related to gender sensitivity as their understanding helps further clarify the distinction between gender and sex. Femaleness, as alluded to earlier, is natural/biological and constant throughout one's natural life. This also applies to maleness.

Femininity refers to what a particular society views as the role of a person who is born female. One is therefore born female but not necessarily feminine so femininity, just like gender,is a social construct. A particular social group chooses what roles to allot to males and females whether powerful or powerless. For example ,males and females are perceived differently in matrilineal and patrilineal social groups. In patriarchal ones ,traits such as sweetness, modesty, subservience and humility are looked at as feminine (Toril Moi in Jefferson and Robey, 1986) while adventurism, toughness, roughness and assertiveness are seen as masculine and expected of males. In the end, those so-called traits of femininity and masculinity become stereotypes that each particular society or group expects men and women to abide with in order to fit and not be labeled

deviants. Macionis (1989) actually points out that these stereotypes influence society's attitudes towards men and women either positively or negatively. For example, men are viewed as strong and powerful while women are viewed as weak and emotional. Because of this males are viewed as natural leaders and females, natural followers. Assertions like Aristotle's that females are female by virtue of a lack of certain qualities and St. Thomas Aquinas' that women are imperfect men (Selden and Widdowson, 1993) are both indicative of the subjectivity with which gender can be viewed resulting in gender roles arising which are also socially defined and prescribed. Thus, women have always had to work against the grain in order to negate the deeply entrenched gender biases. These socially defined and prescribed roles result in women ending up doing reproductive and community duties with no monetary value attached while men do 'productive' tasks with high monetary value attached impacting greatly on gender relations throughout the individuals' lives. This, in turn, determines ownership of property, access to resources, distribution and control of resources, allocation of social positions and distribution of power (Shaba and Mahuku, 2003). In short there will be two classes divided on gender and economic lines-the have/economically-independent and politically powerful man and the have-not/economically-dependent woman and politically powerless. Generally, women will end up in the private sphere playing just the supportive role (for example, voting for candidates without being candidates themselves in any election) in spite of their numbers while men dominate the public domain where important decisions are made. They end up holding formal leadership roles and performing high status tasks which empower them economically as well. However, it is important to note that these gender roles are not static, they are constructed by people so they can as well be deconstructed over time by the same. In other words, since gender stereotypes are socially constructed they can and should be socially deconstructed. It is, therefore, important to sensitize people so that they understand gender issues, not as a fight between men and women as patriarchy would want it to appear, but that gender issues are about creating space for individuals (both male and female) to achieve their full potential in all aspects of life. In short, the sensitization will be in pursuance of achieving gender equality which means '...equality at all levels of education and in all areas of work, equal control over resources

and equal representation in public and political life' (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2005:14). Gender equality ensures that individuals are given the opportunity to self-actualize regardless of status or sex.

Feminism

A related concept which needs brief mention here is feminism which is a political position committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism ((Toril Moi in Jefferson and Robey, 1986). Feminism therefore looks at distribution of power between males and females the aim being creation of gender parity or 'sex blindness' in all spheres of life. By implication one can be female but not feminine or feminist, male but not masculine as seen by his or her society.

What is gender sensitivity?

Gender sensitivity, then, is, the ability to recognize gender issues for what they are in spite of one's biological make up. This ability to question gender disparities objectively is the beginning of gender awareness which is crucial for the creation of space for individuals to reach their fullest potential unfettered by their biological condition. Education, as has already been highlighted, plays an important role in this gender sensitization process. It does not begin with the children, but the teachers as agents of social change, more so since they now begin working with them from the level of pre-school as Early Childhood Educators, that is from as early an age as three when the children will be in the process of forming their gender self concept. One then wonders the extent to which trainee teachers themselves are gender sensitive if they are to pass it on to the young impressionable minds they would interact with for decades. Are the teachers' colleges not churning out teachers who themselves are going to instill the same gender stereotypes that result in disparities and barriers that gender issues seek to remove? Are the student teachers empowered enough to be able to create a gender sensitive and learning environment for the young children to develop into future gender sensitive individuals? A number of questions arise: Has participation or lack of it by both men and women in this 'public space' created by the college reflected any gender sensitivity at all?

- If not, what roles have been played by either of the sexes?
- What positions have women held in this council?
- Do the positions result in women's issues being taken seriously at higher levels at all in the college community?
- Are the positions simply not tokenism?
- Are student teachers, both male and female, aware of the implications of what they say to the electorate, the positions they hold and how the electorate responds to their behaviour in terms of gender?

It is such issues that an analysis of the 2006/2007 Student Representative Council Elections at the chosen college sought to get an insight into.

A NOTE ON RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research procedures were used to collect and analyze data. This research design is concerned primarily with the process rather than the product, looks at how people interpret their experiences, views the researcher as the main data-gathering instrument in the field and is descriptive as well as inductive. (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 1994). The qualitative paradigm is concerned mainly with the process hence the photographic descriptions characteristic of write-ups of researches done with such a philosophical position in mind, the current one included. Since it is very much dependent on the researcher(s) as the main data-gathering instrument by the three researchers had to immerse themselves in the thick of things, through fieldwork, in order to 'study real-world situations as they unfold naturally...' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982: 28) and witness the goings-on first hand in the political arena of dreams which happened to be the lecture theatre at the college. Qualitative research is thus emic, that is, seeks the insider's view as opposed to its quantitative counterpart which is etic, or detached. When information is finally gathered, the qualitative paradigm demands a descriptive account of what was observed before inductive conclusions. The goal of qualitative research is "to portray the complex pattern of what is being studied in sufficient depth of detail so that one who has not experienced it can

understand it" (Ary et al, 1990: 445). As much detail as possible will be supplied. The main data gathering techniques were documental analysis and observation.

Documental Analysis

Documents scrutinized included campaign posters and the college mission statement. Focus here was on how language, the main carrier of culture, attitudes, feelings, beliefs etc was used. The writers view whatever was produced by the subjects of this research, be it speeches, posters or written work as transcripts of the minds of the subjects. The researchers also analyzed statistics on student enrolment covering Classes of 2005, 2006 and 2007 who were still 'in the mill'.

Observation

This involved keen observation of the electoral process prior to the election day. The researchers took particular interest in the interpersonal social transactions amongst the electorate and between the student politicians and the electorate. Particular attention was paid on roles the females were playing or not playing.

On the eve of elections (at 14.00 hrs) college tradition dictates that the chief warden organizes the final showdown where all students assemble in the lecture theatre where each candidate is given 15 minutes to campaign. Any member of the college community is free to observe the proceedings. The three researchers were part of the around 600 people in the lecture theatre. We took copious notes for analysis later. This organization of events gave the researchers an opportunity to observe the political pugilists, their audience and supporters in a natural setting. If the subjects ever took any interest in the researchers, the latter were like any other non-student, fun-seeking characters. The researchers were far from the epicenter of the subjects' interest. Our six ears and eyes tried, and we believe successfully, to capture the minutest of the proceedings, details which will be vividly painted in words and a sprinkling of figures in accordance with the research's naturalistic bent. This is in line with what Patton, cited in Best and Kahn (1993: 84) opines:

The data from observation consists of detailed description of peoples' activities, actions and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience...

Gender Sensitivity and Candidate Speeches

The 2006 Presidential Race

The 2006 elections, like those of the ensuing year, were characterized by low female candidature, particularly in the higher echelons of power. The posts of president and vice president, for instance, were not contested by females. This particular race was contested by four candidates, all male. Apart from this gender composition of candidates which clearly revealed that top leadership positions were a male preserve, the presidential race was noted for the mudslinging among the candidates, selective cheering and the loud jeering of the audience which perhaps suggested that the outcome was predetermined. One of the candidates made up for his lack of professional dress sense by claiming that jackets won by his rivals, were hideous places in which vile intentions were hidden, so the electorate had better beware! The other candidate was so unkindly booed down that all he got a chance to say was that he hailed from the Nemaushe chieftainship clan and should be the natural president since he was of royal blood! The chieftainship is patriarchal, it should be noted, and the student thought that as a male member of that lineage he had a natural leadership role to play even at college level.

The Post of Vice President

The SRC constitution provides, in the interest of 'equal' representation between 1st Year and 3rd Year students, that the incumbent to this post should be a 1st Year student. There were two contestants and of these, one attracted the interest of the writers. He was extremely popular with the audience and everything from how he raised his fist, the sound of his surname which the audience was chanting; his stare and his very stride seemed to fascinate the audience. All he said was:

*The greatest want of the world is the want of **men**, who will remain true as the needle is to the pole. **Men** who will neither be bought nor sold; **men** who will stand firm though the heavens fall...* [Emphasis added]

The use of the word 'men' as quoted above in a context in which females had shied away from participating seemed in this case to suggest that this particular post and any such ones were meant to be occupied by males.

The Secretary General's Post

It must be acknowledged that B.B.Z was the most ambitious of the female candidates because she campaigned for the loftiest position of secretary general in the 2006 S.R.C. elections. One may be tempted to credit her with bravery for doing this in an election in which the number of female contestants became fewer as posts became loftier.

B.B.Z arrived on the campaign podium with a retinue of men who milled around the stage after dancing to some music. There were a respectable number of her supporters in the audience chanting "Zvopera! Zvopera! Zvopera! Zvopera!" One would have hoped that the name which literally means "That's the end!" meant she was ushering in a new era in which male dominance would be a thing of the past. However, in direct contradiction to one of her favorite campaign lines "*Never underestimate the power of a woman*", there was no woman among her campaign attendants. Perhaps the sight of a "ladies-only" or a mixed entourage was not appealing to her. In any case, the statement '*Never underestimate the power of a woman*' is vague, if not equivocal. It could mean women have the same power as men do but that power is taken for granted. Or that they have a power of its own kind, distinct from that which men have, or of a subtle kind perhaps. If the latter statement is what the candidate meant, then she was wanting in terms of gender sensitivity.

Then, after delivering what was generally a well received campaign speech, she handed the platform over to one of the males in her company. The latter's job was to finish the presentation with some poetry. Why she

asked the male to speak last and not first is not clear to the writers, that is, if at all it was necessary to have him speak at all. Perhaps, quite innocently, she wanted to cash in on that speaker's popularity as a budding poet in the college. However, the unintended message of this gesture was that it is men who must have the final word in important matters. The gesture appears to have done little to cast her in the image of a would-be independent-minded candidate. It may have served to portray her as someone who would end up dancing to the tune of, or pandering at the whims of the dancers and poets in her entourage. Unfortunately, the audience was in no mood for poetry. The budding poet was booed down and that sealed the young lady's fate.

The Food Officer's Post

Mrs. S.M had a relatively easy task fending off the challenge for the post from her male contestants. The rest of the contestants seemed to think the post would be won by a candidate who would deliver the most vitriolic diatribe at the college meal plan. They relentlessly harangued the college, and went to town over what they said was shoddy meal planning and preparation. In a manner characteristic of careerist politicians, they promised their audience the moon in as far as offering a revised and better meal plan was concerned.

Mrs. S. M was refreshingly different. She might have struck a cord with the audience by being down-to-earth and modest. Unlike the majority of the candidates who tended to overdress or wore heavy make-up so as to impress, she carried herself with some amount of restraint. There was no rancor in her voice and her first sentence won her a round of applause and perhaps landed her the post:

Ahoy macomrades! Ahoy macomrades! Eh-h somunhu waamai, basa rangu richange riri rokuona kuti mudining makachena here ,vana vadya here, mapureti akachena here...

[Greetings, comrades! Greetings, comrades! Since I am a woman, my duty will be to see to it that the dining hall is clean, the children/students have eaten the plates are clean...]

That statement was enough to set the auditorium in song. There was a rhythmic chanting of her surname accompanied by equally rhythmic clapping of hands. The rest is history. Mrs. S.M won the post. The statement quoted above needs further analysis. Put simply, the statement is suggestive of this idea; cleaning dining halls and plates is the business of women and they are expected or required to be good at it. The statement echoes the belief by both the student politician and her audience "in the sexual division of labor that links women to the functions of wife, mother, [and] household work". (Ritzer and Goodman, 2003) Such a statement is not consistent with what is expected of a gender sensitive person. A gender sensitive audience is not expected to applaud it either. It is a stereotypical statement. A teacher who leaves college with such an idea is likely to assign classroom duties on the basis of gender and fail to deconstruct gender in the classroom. The truth of the matter is that both males and females are equally competent in doing or overseeing the performance of cleaning duties. It is the business of both males and females too to see to it that places where food is taken and utensils are clean.

The Treasurer's Post

One of the features of the 2006 S.R.C elections was that lady candidates did not have the gender sensitivity necessary to realize that vying for posts among themselves worked to their detriment. The more they vied among themselves, the lesser their chances of increased representation in the S.R.C became. The post of treasurer, for instance, pitted these two ladies against each other. The first to deliver her campaign speech was N.S. Her campaign seemed to hinge on what she had recently 'learnt' in one of her Theory of Education lectures:

***Takaudzwa naa... mulecture yeT.O.E kuti basa rababa ndere kutsvaka mari, raamai ndere kubhajeta"* [We were told by Mr.... in a Theory of Education lecture that a man's role in a family is that of a breadwinner while the duty of a woman is just to budget.**

To show the audience that she was good in the business of budgeting, she told the audience that she had already sourced '*chema*'- token funds with which condolences are traditionally expressed to bereaved families.

Thus students in this situation were asked to come forward to collect the funds. The Vice Principal, who was unobtrusively watching the proceedings from the stage, found himself co-opted in the task of dispensing the funds. He did not have much option but to comply.

If the statement quoted above, which was greeted with around of applause, is indeed true, then it raises two issues. The first is that students take what they receive in lectures wholesale, without ever questioning its authenticity or practicability. Both the campaign candidate and the audience who applauded the gender-stereotyped "lesson" from the lecturer would be guilty of gender role stereotyping. The lecturer has his share of blame too. One therefore wonders how effective the college's products will be in questioning the status quo or in developing a critical mind in their pupils. This seems to fly in the face of the college's mission to produce 'reflective', let alone 'gender sensitive' teachers.

The second issue is that some lecturers themselves may be guilty of propagating gender-stereotyped ideas instead of leading the campaign for gender parity. This could be a clear case of a lecturer harping on patriarchal and sexist ideas that promote the image of man as a breadwinner and a woman as a good-for-the-kitchen person. Such an image is not consistent with current trends in which women are increasingly becoming a prominent force in the labor market. T.M proved to be the popular of the two candidates and N.S despite her display of budgeting prowess lost the post. The election seems to have been won on other grounds though. T.N was renowned for her play acting in the college. Clutching a ward of bank notes, she won the audience over with her theatrics and eloquence which were of little relevance to the post for which she was campaigning.

The 2006 election results were as follows: Only two females won direct election into office. These were the food officer and the treasurer. Two other ladies were co-opted into the SRC as hostel representatives, a non-event considering that they were elected from 'ladies-only' hostels. In other words there was no alternative choice in terms of gender.

2007 Elections

Campaign Posters

Admittedly, a number of campaign posters, apart from identifying the gender identity of the candidates through accompanying pictures or drawings, were not suggestive of gender bias. Some however, were openly gender insensitive, associating a particular gender with privilege to occupy leadership posts. Other posters were sexist in innuendo.

One observed poster of a Third Year male student who was vying for the post of president had the following message:

Vote W.M for Presidency. No one ever attains very eminent success by simply doing what is required of him, it is the amount of excellence that determines the greatness of ultimate distinction. [Emphasis added.] It can be inferred from this message that the creator of the poster, judging from his use of the pronoun 'him', associates 'eminent success', 'excellence', 'greatness' 'distinction' and indeed leadership with males.

A female Third Year student, E.M, who was vying for the post of Secretary General, had a picture of herself and the following words on her campaign poster:

*Vote E.M. for Secretary General
More ladies, more fire! Usadherere!! Mai Mujuru VOTONGA!*

[Vote E.M. for Secretary General]

More ladies, more fire! Don't take me for granted!! Mrs. Mujuru is REIGNING SUPREME!

The wording of the poster might be an indication of the candidate's awareness of her perceived inferiority or position of disadvantage. Who, for instance did she suppose would take her for a push-over? The poster

seemed to indicate the candidate's lack of confidence in her capabilities. The pronouncement on her being no push-over seems to be a defensive mechanism to 'warn' those whom she perceived to be looking down upon her as a pretender and not a contender to the post. We strongly suspect the jibe was aimed at the males, judging from the 'more ladies, more fire' statement and the reference to Mrs. Mujuru, the Vice President. The candidate appears to insinuate that if Mrs. Mujuru was appointed Vice President then the electorate should automatically vote her into the Secretary General's post without considering her merits. While it is acknowledged that the gender representation in the Zimbabwean presidium is ideal and worth emulating, the candidate seems to have taken it too far by making an open appeal to her femininity, and arguing for the election of females for the sake of it. For all we know, her model in the presidium may have won her post by merit.

Yet another campaign poster of a male candidate campaigning for the post of sports officer had the following message:

Vote C.M for Sports Officer. The one man who goes farthest is generally the one who is willing to do and dare...
[Emphasis supplied]

It seems, from the use of the word 'man' that the poster creator was implying that 'going farthest', doing and daring is a male preserve. The message suggests that women do not go farthest, are not action-oriented and enterprising. This makes the message gender insensitive.

A poster of yet another male candidate for the sports officer's post had a portrait of a man wearing dreadlocks and the name 'Dread' as an appendage to the candidates' names. The portrait bore no resemblance to the candidate. Neither was the candidate in the habit of spotting dreadlocks. The writers were left to wonder why the candidate chose to draw a man with dread-locked hair if his intention was obviously not to show his true likeness on the portrait. Perhaps the dread-locked man was a symbol of, or his idea of macho-ness, by which the candidate hoped to scoop votes.

The same poster had the message: "*Usadherere! Hausundi!*" [*Don't take [me] for granted! I am no push-over!*] The vernacular words quoted, denote the idea of the candidate's possession of raw physical power or force. Together with the portrayal of a man spotting dreadlocks, it seems clear to the writers that the candidate ascribes qualities such as physical power and resoluteness to men while women are by implication, relegated to being feeble pushovers.

One first year male student who was campaigning for the post of entertainment officer had a campaign poster promising the electorate "cool entertainment programs". Of his two names, it was the surname which was put to the diminutive and was corrupted from its vernacular version to "Cigar" so as perhaps to give it an English ring. Sociologists, particularly Vander Zanden (1979) have noted the significance of shortening names, a practice more commonly associated with names of males than those of females. The latter notes that names of females are usually long, soft, polysyllabic and melodic while those given to males easily lend themselves to the diminutive and are hard-hitting, brisk and suggestive of energy. Given that names are tags, labels that impute certain characteristics to their bearers, the writers cannot escape the conclusion that the candidate's shortened name was meant to appeal to his perceived macho-ness.

2007 Campaign Speeches

The campaign speeches on the eve of the 2007 elections were interesting, not only in terms of the language and opinions expressed by candidates but in terms of gestures, audience responses and the unfolding gender trends. The trends were almost similar to those of the previous year. The election was gendered not only because the ratio of male to female aspirants to the SRC posts minus posts of hostel representatives was 12:4, but also because some posts, particularly those of president and vice president did not attract any female candidature. Another notable trend was the conspicuous absence of women in roles of campaign manageresses particularly for those vying for posts in the higher echelons of power. This seemed to suggest there was an unwritten rule in the college that top student leadership posts were a male preserve. It will

be conceded that while some candidates' speeches did not have any gender-biased innuendos, other speeches and actions had insinuations of the type in question. Of the presidential hopefuls, one attracted the interest of the writers. He described himself as 'The Messiah' 'The Man' who would deliver. He also preached 'fearlessness' in addressing students' grievances. In a similar vein, a vice presidential hopeful ascribed to himself the qualities of "a man of action not words". The message, whether unintended or otherwise was that messiahship, deliverance, fearlessness, action and not dithering were synonymous with men and were by implication traits not to be found in women.

The race for the post of secretary general was a duel between a female and a male candidate. The former openly appealed to their femininity. "For every successful man, there is a woman behind", she claimed. This statement was probably meant to show that women were important behind the scenes. The candidate's preference that women should be "behind" and not in front is indicative of her little, if any, appreciation of gender parity.

The sports officer's post attracted the interest of four candidates, among them, three males and one female. One of the male candidates showed gender insensitivity through the use of pronouns and this paper has already given this aspect adequate treatment. The electorate was not bothered by this but seemed to have made up their minds on the female candidate who turned out to be immensely popular, judging from the audience's reaction to her. She claimed that as a woman, she was better organized. It would then seem that according to her, differences between males and females go beyond sexual or biological ones, a departure from sociological understanding of the differences which sociologists particularly of feminist thinking, deem to be only biological and cultural. In spite of that language, she was massively popular with the electorate and went on to win the post

The post of treasurer had a sole candidate, a tall, athletic, female student. Although she was the only candidate, she had to speak to the electorate as demanded by tradition to show them what mantle she was made of. She is credited by the writers for producing a campaign speech which

was clear and focused. And yet it appears that it was not the speech that drew the attention of the audience. The responses of the audience were soft cries of "Audie babie!" The shortening of her first name is significant to the writers, suggesting as it does the desire of the audience to lend a soft, melodic feminine ring to her name. Add to this the title 'babie', the image conjured up is romantic in nature, indicating the audience's preoccupation with the candidate's feminine looks and not her speech or ideas. The audience's perception of the candidate was therefore clearly gendered. 'Appreciating' people for their looks and making suggestive overtures is more associated with sexual harassment than with gender sensitivity.

The use of the word "babie" needs further analysis. The word comes from the same root as "baby" or "babe" which means infant, toddler or kid. Askew and Ross (1988) note that words often used to describe women are the same as those used to describe children. Put bluntly, this had the effect of implying that women are children who are less capable of attaining maturity and exist for the sole purpose of looking tender and pretty. The candidate won the post. She was uncontested anyway.

The writers were struck by the coincidence that another female candidate had landed the same post in the previous election. One of the writers, therefore, went on to interview a few members of the electorate about this trend. The results of the interviews revealed a belief by students that females, once elected, were less likely to embezzle (much) funds than their male counterparts who were bigger spenders. Females were also said to be less courageous to do that. Such thinking is not grounded in the proper understanding of gender differences and tottered more on sexual prejudice than fact.

The last two posts to be contested were those of entertainment and transport officers. The latter had a sole male candidate while the former had two male and one female candidates contesting. The female contestant designated herself as "the only courageous lady in First Year". This designation assumes that courage is a rare commodity associated least with women. That she elected to call herself "the only courageous **lady** in First Year", in an apparent effort to appeal to her form instead of her substance, is an attitude which smacks of a gender stereotyped inferiority complex.

The 2007 Elected President's Acceptance Speech

The elected president, to his credit delivered a short maiden speech which was free of gender bias. However, it is the non verbal communication surrounding his speech that drew the attention of the writers of this paper. The president elect went to the rostrum accompanied by five escorts. Of these, one was male and four were female. In spite of the fact that the results were made in-doors, one of the female escorts held an umbrella for him as he delivered the speech. The writers were left to wonder at the meaning of this. Why this disproportion in the sex of escorts? It was a far cry from the earlier situation in which the males had dominated as campaign managers. Why this sudden change in the participation of females? What was the significance of the female escort holding the umbrella, a menial task? Why not the male? This seemed to suggest that females were content to participate in student politics for as long as they occupied subservient and peripheral roles as props for males who seemed preordained to dominate them. It also suggested that males jealously guarded over 'their territory' and only gave to females as much space as would not threaten the males' perceived power base.

2006 and 2007 Election Results at a Glance

The table below shows the 2006/7 election results and the gender of the incumbent.

Post	Year	Sex	Year	Sex
1. President	2006	Male	2007	Male
2. Vice President	2006	Male	2007	Male
3. Secretary General	2006	Male	2007	Male
4. Vice Secretary General	2006	Male	2007	Male
5. Treasurer	2006	Female	2007	Female
6. Sports Officer	2006	Male	2007	Male
7. Entertainment Officer	2006	Male	2007	Male
8. Transport Officer	2006	Male	2007	Female
9. Food Officer	2006	Female	2007	Male
10. Three Hostel Reps	2006	2 Female + M male	2007	2 Female + 1 Male

It is clear from the table that male candidates in both years took up not only the loftiest posts but the majority as well. Female students, in spite of being a 53.8% majority, have a 22.2% stake in the posts that could possibly be contested by either gender. The fact that there are two hostels for females and one for males means males cannot contest in female hostels and vice-versa and the outcome in terms of gender is obvious. This has the effect of slightly increasing female representation in the SRC to 33.3%. The number of hostels available to females together with the higher female population, it will be noted, indicate the college administration's policy of affirmative action in favor of females, some small step towards gender sensitivity.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper makes the following conclusions about gender sensitivity at the college in question:

- That the college mission statement is not very clear on the subject of gender sensitivity
- That college has a gender policy that only ensures female students are available in relatively larger quantities but does not ensure they have equality in terms of representation in leadership positions. The college could assist through educating both male and female students on the benefits of gender parity at various levels of the society.
- That the elections at the college are not gender free and fair and that the electioneering process at the college is fraught with gender conceptions, misconceptions and innuendos for which the education students' receive or do not receive on campus might be responsible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above discussion and conclusions, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- Given that a mission statement is supposed to drive an institution and give its members their marching orders, we recommend that a clearer and more consistent harmonized document

(mission statement) that does not prevaricate on gender be used at the college. Such a statement may need to reaffirm whether gender sensitivity is part of the college's main business. Since there is a gender policy on student enrolment, we recommend that there be a corresponding policy that deliberately seeks to increase the participation of women in positions of leadership. A gateway to this could lie in the revision of the SRC constitution so that there is a quota for females. College administration as chief custodians of the college mission could sensitize the student body on the need to revise their SRC constitution to reflect the flow of current thinking in male-female relations.

We recommend that there be a deliberate effort to equip student teachers for the task of deconstructing gender. Such efforts may begin with sensitizing lecturers so that they do not transmit gender-stereotypical ideas as they go about their work.

We recommend that there be further research in this area along these lines so that institutions such as the one under study are audited to assess their preparedness to deconstruct gender, given their important role of producing teachers, who are significant players in the educational process.

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